

DFEH News Brief

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STATE ORDERS CAR RENTAL COMPANY TO PAY \$89,864 FOR FAILURE TO ACCOMMODATE EMPLOYEE'S DISABILITY

ELK GROVE, CA -- The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) announced today that the Fair Employment and Housing Commission (Commission) ordered Avis Budget Group, Inc. to pay \$89,864 in damages in a workplace disability discrimination case.

The Commission, in a precedential decision, found that when a Budget Rent-a-Car salesperson asked for an accommodation for her mental disability, the company denied her request. The company also illegally asked the employee for details about her disability.

"People with disabilities are productive workers when employers accommodate them," said DFEH Director Phyllis Cheng. "Every employer should focus on helping these individuals succeed in the workplace and respect the employee's rights to medical privacy."

When full time salesperson Eleanor Reed submitted a doctor's note asking for a six-hour workday to accommodate her mental disability, the car rental company put her on unpaid leave for five months. The company had previously allowed Ms. Reed to work a shortened day to accommodate a physical disability. After failing to communicate with her for five months about her accommodation request, the company opted to allow Ms. Reed to return to work, but only at 16 hours per week, jeopardizing her seniority and health benefits. The company also required Ms. Reed to turn over her psychiatric file and see a company psychologist; steps unnecessary to her job accommodation and illegal.

The Commission ordered the car rental company to pay Ms. Reed \$14,864 for the income she lost and \$50,000 for emotional distress. The Commission also ordered the company to pay a \$25,000 administrative fine to the state's General Fund, to develop and post policy prohibiting workplace discrimination, and to undergo antidiscrimination training.

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The DFEH is the state agency charged with enforcing California's civil rights laws. The mission of the DFEH is to protect the people of California from unlawful discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations and from hate violence. For more information, visit the Department's Web site at www.dfeh.ca.gov.